

AIR UNIVERSITY



The Strategic Context

Air power is global . . . in its nature and its application.

—Gen Carl “Tooeey” Spaatz

The New American Way of War

1. American military forces traditionally have pursued a wartime strategy of attrition and annihilation aimed at destroying enemy forces in the field.

Rooted in surface concepts of warfare, this strategy relies on large-scale forces employing mass, concentration, and firepower to destroy enemy forces through a series of sequential battles leading to operational or strategic objectives.

2. Unlike surface forces, modern air and space forces do not have to achieve tactical objectives on the battlefield before pursuing operational or strategic objectives.

From the outset, air forces can pursue any objective, in any priority or sequence.

- Concentrated airpower can achieve theaterwide objectives, bypassing tactical obstacles without having to engage in sequential battles of attrition.

3. A new alternative to attrition warfare, airpower employed as part of an asymmetric force strategy, is the basis for a New American Way of War.

- Airpower allows joint forces to leverage sophisticated military capabilities to achieve US objectives through an asymmetric force strategy.
- Defined by the theater commander and articulated in the war plan for the theater of operation, centers of gravity are the sources of the enemy's ability to effectively wage war.
- Once centers of gravity are identified and ranked, the theater commander can employ airpower to attack them directly.

This strategy, executed in parallel with other air or surface operations, allows simultaneous attack of enemy centers of gravity.

Although their nature and relative importance can be expected to vary, centers of gravity usually include the leadership elite, command and control systems, internal security mechanisms, war production capability, and one, some, or all branches of the armed forces.

By conducting air operations to attack the range of the enemy's crucial war-fighting capabilities in a parallel fashion, air forces can overwhelm an adversary and achieve decisive effects.

From Peace to Conflict

1. Theater and functional commanders in chiefs maintain constant awareness of shifting threats to our national security and sensitivity to meeting national security goals within their area of responsibility.

The CINC's concerns span the range of military options from humanitarian operations to full-scale combat.

- Even in a time of relative peace, geographic commanders are challenged by a diversity of situations requiring the employment of military forces.

These challenges include regional factions seeking to expand their influence by coercion or force, political upheaval producing human suffering, and threats directed at US citizens or military forces.

- An adversary's ability to employ a variety of sophisticated lethal and nonlethal weapons constantly challenges a CINC's ability to recognize potentially critical situations, prevent the development of such situations, deter actual conflict and, if necessary, fight and win decisively.

2. In peacetime, national policy, national security strategy, defense policy, and the national military strategy are sources of guidance for combatant commanders and service chiefs.

- During peacetime, deliberate planning procedures are used to evaluate specific situations and plan for military response. These procedures are based on the best available information at the time of the planning process.
- In a crisis, however, the situation is dynamic, and time for planning may be limited to a matter of days.
- As a crisis develops, the theater commander provides his assessment to the National Military Command Center.

As much as 18 to 24 months may be required to identify adequate responses, evaluate courses of action, and prepare deployment plans.

In time-sensitive situations, crisis action procedures are used to plan for military action.

An adequate and feasible military response in a crisis demands flexible procedures keyed to the time available, to rapid and effective communications, and to the use of previous planning whenever possible.

- With the decision of the NCA to employ military force, the chairman of the Joint Chiefs of Staff issues a *warning order*.
- The NCA decides on the course of military action to be taken and the CINC receives an *alert* or *planning order*.
- Execution planning produces an operational order (OPORD).
- Upon NCA direction, the OPORD is implemented through an *execute order* that directs the CINC to carry out the directed military action.

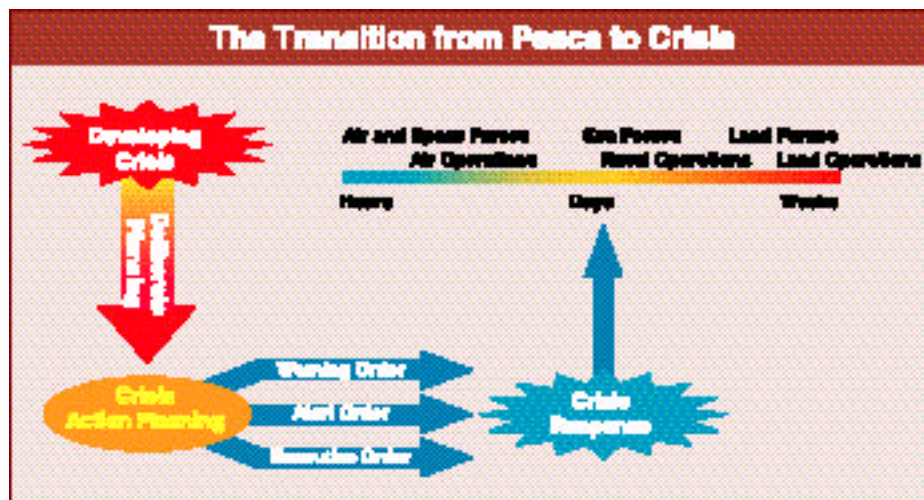
With a warning order, the concerned CINC develops courses of action for NCA consideration.

With an alert or planning order, execution planning begins.

The OPORD coordinates the execution of military action.

The execute order directs the CINC to carry out the directed military action.

3. In executing military actions within the theater, the CINC develops the campaign plan necessary to achieve the end state directed by the NCA.



- Campaign planning encompasses elements of both the deliberate and crisis action planning processes.

Campaigns are joint and serve as the focus for operations within the theater.

- If the scope of contemplated operations requires it, campaign planning begins with, or during, deliberate planning and continues through crisis action planning.
- Campaign plans form the basis for developing subordinate campaign plans, supporting plans, and operational plans for campaign phases.
- Campaign plans implement theater strategy and serve as the planning template for theater operations.

The degree to which the work done in deliberate planning may serve as the core for a campaign plan depends on the particular crisis, theater, and objectives.

Based on the campaign plan, appropriate elements are then translated into the operation order format of the joint operational planning and execution system for execution.

4. When conducting operations, whether in an environment of relative peace or of combat, the theater CINC engages adversaries at the operational level of war.

- The focus at the theater level is on operational art; that is, on the use of military forces to achieve strategic goals through the design, organization, integration, and conduct of campaigns and major operations.
- At the operational level of war, theater commanders integrate military forces in operations designed to achieve theater objectives.

Through operational art, the theater commander translates strategy into theater operations and, ultimately, into tactical actions.

Land, sea, and air and space forces provide the commander with the military capabilities necessary to conduct successful operations.

National Security Strategy

1. The end of the cold war transformed the national security requirements of the United States.

The principal national security task of the cold war era was to contain or deter an overarching threat.

- For the foreseeable future, our principal national security task will be to prevent the emergence of a peer competitor while dealing effectively with a myriad of complex contingencies in nearly every corner of the globe.

To enable the United States to meet the varied challenges of the post-cold war era, our national security strategy of engagement and enlargement calls for the nation to be engaged around the world with the objective of enlarging the family of democratic nations.

- Our post-cold war strategy depends on maintaining a strong defense and ensuring that America's military forces are ready to deter, fight, and win wars.

We are reducing the number of overseas bases and forward deployed units while putting increased emphasis on expeditionary, mobile forces that can deploy quickly.

2. It is within this context that our military strategy and the capabilities that airpower brings to the joint force must be considered.

National Military Strategy

1. US national military strategy describes the objectives, concepts, tasks, and capabilities necessary to meet the goals set for the military in national security strategy.

US national military strategy evolves as the international environment, national strategy, and national military objectives change.

- This strategy lays the basis for applying military instruments at the strategic and operational levels of war.
- It requires responsive military forces to rapidly and decisively cope with diverse threats.
 - Nuclear and conventional threats.
 - Regional instability.
 - Proliferation of weapons of mass destruction.

- Threats to multilateral peacekeeping operations.
- Drug traffic and terrorism.
- Regional wars.

2. Essentially, the United States has three strategic options to consider.

The first is to prevent threats from emerging; the second is to deter threats that do emerge; the third is to defeat the enemy, if required.

- At the core of these options is strategic nuclear deterrence. However, the bulk of our armed forces must be prepared for worldwide military operations.
- If deterrence or containment should fail, we will fight to win—quickly, efficiently, and decisively.

In these operations, we will draw largely upon our conventional war-fighting capabilities.

Air Force Strategic Vision

1. The Air Force's strategic vision supports the national strategy and the joint vision, and captures the global nature of the Air Force.

The Air Force provides the nation nuclear and conventional deterrence; flexible, sustainable, long-range combat power; global mobility; and control of the high ground of air and space.

- The global nature of modern airpower also rests upon the speed with which we project power—the ability to respond quickly to crises.

It is the combination of speed, global range, precision, and lethality that makes airpower such a responsive, flexible, and powerful force.

- The combined characteristics and core competencies of air and space power make it a formidable force for the nation—one capable of dealing with a wide range of contingencies across the entire spectrum of time and conflict.

2. Air, land, and sea forces have evolved to operate at maximum efficiency in their respective operational environments and to deliver superior combat capability.

- The three-dimensional environment in which airpower operates makes the Air Force inherently different from land and maritime forces.
- The strategic perspective and responsiveness air and space power provides to commanders at all levels offer an unobstructed vision and broader understanding of the battlespace—situational awareness.

Each has unique strengths and vulnerabilities that derive in part from its operational environment and its doctrine for the best application of combat power in support of the CINC's concept of operations.

Airpower emanates from the exploitation of air and space in peace and war.

The capability enabling this type of perspective on a global basis is global awareness.